

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Helen Tamura Onuma

"Well, I remember he [father] used to make 'ōkolehao by the gallons, with the help of his friends. . . . And then, my dad used to be a generous man so whenever friends come over, he used to serve them 'ōkolehao. Friends means cowboys from the ranch."

Helen Tamura Onuma was born in Keōmuku, in a home not far from Ka Lanakila O Ka Mālamalama Church. Her father, Ichiro Tamura, whom ranch people called "Murata" for some reason, was a honeybee caretaker. He also made kiawe charcoal, grew watermelons, raised pigs and chickens, and made 'ōkolehao.

Helen attended Keōmuku School until 1927, when she moved to Kō'ele to attend the just-opened Kō'ele Grammar School. In 1933, her mother, father, and siblings followed her to Kō'ele, where Ichiro Tamura worked for the ranch as a watchman and caretaker.

After graduating from Lāna'i High and Elementary School, Helen, in 1941, married Toshio Onuma, an employee of Hawaiian Pineapple Company. They eventually moved to Lāna'i City.

A resident of Honolulu since 1980, Helen, now widowed, plans to someday move back to Lāna'i where she still owns a home.

Tape No. 16-20-1-88
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
with
Helen Tamura Onuma (HO)
November 16, 1988
Honolulu, O'ahu
BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mrs. Helen Onuma on November 16, 1988, at her home in Honolulu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, Mrs. Onuma, let's start by having you tell me when you were born and where you were born.

HO: I was born (1922), September 26, at Keōmuku.

WN: Now where was your---what was your father [Ichiro Tamura] doing in Keōmuku?

HO: At that time, he had a honeybee business.

WN: What did he do?

HO: Well, what he did was, he used to take care the bees, beehives, and harvest, and send it over to the Mainland, sometimes. They use it for making cosmetics, some kind of cosmetics.

WN: Oh, really?

HO: That's what he told me.

WN: Was it for eating, too?

HO: I guess for eating, too. They wanted kiawe bee honey, at that time.

WN: And Keōmuku had plenty kiawe?

HO: Yes.

WN: I see. Was he self-employed?

HO: At that time, maybe he was. Anyway, I was young so I don't quite remember. But I remember he leaving the house early and coming home really late.

WN: Did you help him at all?

HO: No, not at that time. I was too young.

WN: Where was your father from?

HO: He's from somewhere in Sendai, Japan area.

WN: Oh. Sendai is which ken?

HO: My cousin that I'm going to meet tonight, he is from Sendai. And he knows quite a bit about it.

WN: Is that in Hiroshima?

HO: Hiroshima is a little different from Sendai. It took me quite a while to reach Sendai on the bullet train. That was in 1976.

WN: Shinkansen, yeah?

HO: Mm hmm.

WN: Yeah. What about your mother? Where is she from?

HO: My mother [Ayako Tamura] is from Aki-gun, Hiroshima.

WN: She came as a picture bride?

HO: Yes.

WN: Did your mother work in Keomuku at all?

HO: Well, in Japan, she never did work. She went to school all along, you know. Making Japanese kimonos and those flower arrangements and stuff like that so when she came to the Islands, well, she had kind of hard time to get adjusted in the beginning, but she did learn.

WN: I see. I see. You told me earlier that your mother was a pretty good fisherman.

(Laughter)

HO: Well, you see my dad used to go fishing all the time, so she did go along. And, you know, I guess she did okay. They did night torching. They caught fish like manini, and maybe once in a while, mullet, you know, whatever that's in season.

WN: What about lobsters? They had lobsters down there?

HO: Yeah, they did have lobsters, but it's different area.

WN: Oh.

HO: Those days, you can catch fish by the---was really plentiful. But what my dad used to do, he just throw the net once and just enough for that particular meal.

WN: I see. Who were your neighbors in Keōmuku?

HO: Well, one time, we had Mr. Nishimura's parents.

WN: Susumu Nishimura?

HO: Maybe that was his mother, we used to call her "Machama." Machama. Mrs. [Matsuyama]. That's all I remember. Because we were young at that time. And at one time, we had Mr. Ohara, he was helping my dad.

WN: With the bees?

HO: With the yard, taking care of the chicken and hogs, those daily things. And that man used to like that beach area, so he stayed. Take care of the place while my dad, you know, goes out. Taking care of his job, you know.

WN: You said that the house that you were born in was across the way from the [Ka Lanakila O Ka Mālamalama] Church?

HO: Yes, across from the Hawaiian church. We had about--let's see--three or four homes in that area, lined up.

WN: You mean where the coconut grove is now?

HO: Yes. And one of the homes were Mr. and Mrs. [Keanu] Kahaleanu's home. And my sister told me the other day that Mrs. Kahaleanu was the mid---when she had her baby, she was the midwife at that time, you know.

WN: I see. I see.

HO: Interesting, yeah?

WN: Was she the midwife to your mother, too?

HO: Well, my mom came from Japan when she was twenty-one. So, no.

WN: This Kahaleanu family, what did they do? Do you know, besides midwife?

HO: Well, I was young at that time so I don't quite remember. But they had children. Ben, Katherine, and Joe, George, Mabel, Lily, you know? They had big families.

WN: Big family. Besides beekeeping, what else did your father do for, you know, occupation?

HO: Well, he used to---what do you call, charcoal?

WN: Mm hmm. Make charcoal . . .

HO: Make charcoal, yeah. Charcoal and what else? He did lot of little things, you know.

WN: Did he have the hut?

HO: Yes, he made the hut. And made the actual charcoal. And he used to bag it and, I guess, sell it to the market.

WN: Kiawe?

HO: Kiawe. Pure kiawe wood only, you know. And they used to make 'okolehao, too. Mr. Ohara and my dad, they were good at making 'okolehao at that time.

WN: Had ti down there? Ti leaf?

HO: They need ti leaves?

WN: Was it---did they make with ti [root] or. . . .

HO: I'm afraid I don't know what they used. Not kiawe? They used to make it in the kiawe area, you know. And then when we used to have visitors from the ranch, the cowboys come over, you know. He would serve them.

WN: (Chuckles) Interesting.

HO: Yeah.

WN: Did they have sake, other kind liquor, too?

HO: I know only 'okolehao they used to make because that thing, it drips. I was five years old.

WN: (Chuckles) You were only five years old. Were there other Hawaiian families or Japanese families living down there?

HO: Oh, yes.

WN: Was it mostly Hawaiian or Japanese in Keōmuku?

HO: Well, we had this Kahaleanu family and Kaopuikis, you know. (Noise in background.) And then later on, when we moved to the other area, we were kind of far apart. So. . . .

WN: So when you lived across from the church, you folks were more together?

HO: Yeah, that's where I was born.

WN: Yeah, I see. And then where did you move to after that?

HO: Closer to the city side. But still it's far, you know.

WN: Closer to Keōmuku city? Or closer to Lāna'i City?

HO: Closer to, we call that Maunalei.

WN: Oh, oh, oh.

HO: That area, I remember my dad raised watermelons. Not right by the church. Next area [i.e., in Maunalei]. Because the land was plentiful. He sawed all the kiawes and then, got the pump and well. They have to test the soil where there's water first and then make a well.

WN: So, Maunalei was the more fertile area for agriculture?

HO: I guess so or maybe before Maunalei, between the Keōmuku town and Maunalei. It's all far apart. The homes are all far apart.

WN: How did he ship the watermelons?

HO: Oh, let's see. He shipped it on the boat by the hundreds. He lined it up, all, on the wharf and then put it on one at a time. You know, one at a time. And I'm sure he did have help at that time, like Mr. Ohara.

WN: The wharf being Kahalepalaoa [Landing]?

HO: I really don't know whether it was that area or the other one because first maybe you take them on a smaller boat and then maybe a little bigger one. Maybe, because it's shallow; the big one cannot come right to the shore. (HO whispers:) I was only five.

WN: (Chuckles) Yeah, I know. I know I'm asking you hard questions but, you know, if you don't remember just let me know. But I was wondering too, when you were small growing up in Keōmuku, what language did you speak at home?

HO: Oh. Well, my mother speak perfect Japanese because she finish Japan college. And my dad spoke Hawaiian pretty well. The simple Hawaiian.

WN: So what do you remember as talking, speaking?

HO: I remember, let's see, now, I know my mother used to speak to me in Japanese, and since, you know, we used to have Japanese[-language] school, later years we did go to Japanese[-language] school. So it was easier for me, you know. But, English homework, I had hard time because my mother, she cannot speak English good. And my dad would teach me more because he knew a little.

WN: Do you remember Keōmuku School at all, going there?

HO: Mm hmm.

WN: What do you remember about it?

HO: My first teacher was Mr. Tashima. He came right out of college. He was maybe twenty-three or twenty-four years old at the time. And he taught first to sixth grade. So in the first grade, maybe we had two or three students; second grade maybe one. And I remember in the sixth grade, we had few. One day's time he had six classes.

(Laughter)

WN: How far away from the school did you live?

HO: Well, at that time I felt it was quite a distance so my dad used to take us on the buggy with two horses. And then after school, he would pick us up. But sometimes he's late, so I would stay at Mrs. [Hattie] Kaopuiki's place. They were so nice.

WN: They had a big family, too, huh?

HO: Mm hmm. Big family. Nice warm Hawaiian family. And on weekends, my teacher, Mr. Tashima, would walk us home and stay over for the weekends.

WN: Did you go to school barefooted?

HO: You know, funny, I don't remember.

(Laughter)

HO: I don't remember that part. Maybe I did wear slippers because, you know, there's so many kiawes.

WN: Kiawes up there.

HO: Yeah, it's kind of dangerous.

WN: Okay, well, so when you were five years old, 1927 or so, you folks moved to Ko'ele?

HO: Well, first, I moved because . . .

WN: Oh, that's right.

HO: First I moved.

WN: Okay, why did you move?

HO: Well, my parents thought I should get started with the public school, Ko'ele [Grammar School], so I stayed at a private home for a

year.

WN: Did you get homesick?

HO: Well, not quite. I don't remember because they were nice, you know, this family. I just had to follow the rules. And she was nice. She took care of me. Abe family.

WN: Abe.

HO: Mm hmm. Mr. and Mrs. [Eizo and Masuka] Abe. He was working in the shop department. At that time, I don't know whether it was Dole or whatever. And I was a companion for their daughter Fumiko [Abe Watanabe]. She was maybe in the sixth grade.

WN: Oh, I see. So you went to school at Kō'ele, and your parents stayed down at Keōmuku side?

HO: Yeah.

WN: I see. Did your brothers and sisters do the same thing?

HO: Well, at that time, my sister was still younger, so, wasn't necessary to move up. She was a year younger, below me, and my brother was two years below.

WN: I see, yeah, you were the oldest.

HO: Yeah. And Kō'ele [Grammar] School was not too far away from where I stayed at Abe's place. So, walking distance.

WN: So Kō'ele School was a bigger school than Keōmuku?

HO: Oh, yes. Do you call that Kō'ele School? It's above, by [where] the [Cavendish] Golf Course [is today]?

WN: I think that's what they called it? I'm not sure . . .

HO: Kō'ele School? Oh. [Kō'ele Grammar School opened in 1927. Keōmuku School closed in 1929.]

WN: I'm not sure, though.

HO: Mm hmm.

WN: But that's the one you went to, the one that was, where the golf course [clubhouse] is now?

HO: Mm hmm. It's close to Kō'ele at that time. Walking distance.

WN: I see, I see. So when you moved to Kō'ele, was it mostly Hawaiians living there or Japanese?

HO: Oh, at that time we had lots of Hawaiians and few Japanese families. And the school principal was living next to our area, close by.

WN: Oh. Who was the principal?

HO: Let's see, Mr. [Carleton E.] Weimer. Mr. [James W.] O'Neal. And lots more. But my principal that I remember and my homemaking teacher was Mrs. [Rose H.] Armstrong.

WN: You have a good memory for your teachers' names.

HO: Because I did like her. She taught me how to make pineapple-papaya jam on Saturdays, you know. I went to school and she taught me. And I heard she's still living somewhere in Kāne'ohe [O'ahu].

WN: Is that right?

HO: Mm. We invited her for our [Lāna'i High and Elementary School] reunion, you know, on our fiftieth reunion?

WN: Yeah.

HO: But she couldn't make it that time.

WN: Mm, I see. Mrs. Armstrong?

HO: Mm hmm. And Mr. [Alton] Armstrong was our principal at that time.

WN: I see. You remember how you felt about moving to Kō'eale? Were you happy or sad. . . .

HO: You know those days, it's different, you know. We have no choice, yeah? If your parents say, well, it's time for you to go, you know, you just listen and obey.

WN: How often did you go home to Keōmuku?

HO: Oh, let's see, oh maybe once a month or maybe on holidays. Mr. Abe would drive me halfway to Keōmuku because the road is really bad those days. And my parents would come with a horse, meet halfway, and we'll ride home. And took us just as long as going to Lahaina.

(Laughter)

WN: You mean, on the boat?

HO: Yeah, on the boat go to Lahaina is shorter [i.e., takes less time] than coming up the city at those days.

WN: Is that right?

HO: For us. And by the time I reach home, I have all blisters.

WN: Oh, yeah?

H0: Riding the horse . . .

WN: Riding the horse.

H0: Sometimes.

WN: You rode your own horse?

H0: Yeah, I had a horse, a red horse, and my sister had a white horse. We each had our own. My dad, my mom, and three of us at that time.

WN: Did you bring the horse up with you to Kō'ele?

H0: Well, at that time, no. I didn't bring because I didn't need.

WN: When you were in Kō'ele growing up, what did you do to have a good time?

H0: Let's see. You know, we had lots of Hawaiian boys at that time, you know. So we used to climb on the tree or play master or follow the fence. You heard of "follow the fence"?

WN: No, no.

H0: When the fence is closed, you can go through, huh? But, when it's open, you cannot pass.

WN: Oh.

H0: Yeah, it's interesting, yeah? (WN chuckles.) And you know George Kahāleanu?

WN: Uh huh.

H0: He was so tall and, boy, he can run those days. So he would catch us in no time. I still remember that. And they're all good at sports. All kinds, because those days, there's not too many toys. So, you have to make your own, like a slingshot and all those games. Rin Tin Tin. You heard of Rin Tin Tin?

WN: No.

H0: You have a half a gallon can.

WN: Yeah.

H0: And you put in rocks and you close it. Okay, it makes noise. So we call that Rin Tin Tin. And you have a goal, baseball goal. You know, what you call that now? Where you stand?

WN: Base?

H0: Yeah, you have a base, okay. And then you throw the Rin Tin Tin and the person standing on the base have to go and get that and put it on the base. And meanwhile, the others run and hide.

WN: Okay. Yeah.

H0: And if I see you, I'll call your name and I shake the Rin Tin Tin and put it back on the ground.

WN: And then they're caught?

H0: They're caught.

WN: I see.

H0: If you have five, you have to catch the five.

WN: So you have to just look around and look for them?

H0: Yeah, look around and look for them.

WN: Oh and when you see them, you have to run back to the base and shake the can . . .

H0: Shake the can . . .

WN: . . . before them.

H0: . . . yeah, before them. But if I'm far away and if they reach the base ahead of me, they'll shake the can and they'll throw again. Then all the rest of the boys can hide again. That's how.

(Laughter)

H0: And sometimes, I used to cry because I'm, you know, wahines are slow, huh? (WN chuckles.) Men are fast. Boys, you know. Not all the times. Maybe once.

WN: (WN chuckles.) So you played mostly with boys.

H0: Well, my sisters, too, sometimes.

WN: Was that because there were more boys living there or. . . .

H0: Yeah, because at that time, at Kō'ele [i.e., Lāna'i] Ranch, there were lots of Hawaiians, parents are maybe cowboys.

WN: So the girls didn't go and play by themselves?

H0: Sometimes we go and play by ourselves. But we used to do different things like now. What we used to do is, maybe with my lady friends, we would climb up the mountain or we would go to even Maunalei Gulch. You heard of Maunalei Gulch?

WN: Yes.

HO: Come back. And one time, I remember, I took my three friends that live in the city. Over the tunnel. There's three tunnels.

WN: Oh, yeah? I didn't know that.

HO: Yeah, there's three tunnels. Go over and come back inside with the flashlight. Boy, it was scary. And now I think, boy, I don't know how the heck I did that because dangerous, too, you know. You know, in the dark, yeah? Through the tunnels. And sometimes my dad used to take us go through the tunnels. I guess he did go to check on maybe some of, you know, those water pressures and whatever at that time.

WN: When you first moved to Kō'e'ele, what was your house like, the one that--the Abe house?

HO: Oh, those days, those old homes.

WN: How many bedrooms?

HO: Well, at least about two or three bedrooms. Two or three bedrooms. What they used to do? Oh, the bathroom?

WN: Yeah.

HO: They used to boil the water. You call it furo. Make fire outside, I guess.

WN: Oh, the furo was in a separate . . .

HO: Yeah, separate.

WN: Was that your own furo or was it a community type?

HO: Oh, the Abes had their own, okay. But up the city area, is all community furo at that time. The men's side is one and ladies', the other side.

WN: I'm wondering, was it only the Japanese that had furo?

HO: Well, those days, we used to have Chinese, too. They used to have furo. And even the Filipinos, they had their community furo.

WN: Oh, yeah? I know there was a Shin family.

HO: Shin?

WN: Yeah, a [Korean] family living over there?

HO: Oh, on the ranch?

WN: Yeah.

HO: Sam Shin's dad [Bon Soon Shin]. Sam Shin and they had a Kwon family. Sam Shin was adopted by [Gi Hong] Kwon family. Because Mrs. Kwon and Mrs. Shin were sisters. They have a lot of children, too, all living.

WN: Kwon is Korean, huh?

HO: Yeah, Kwon. Shin is Korean.

WN: Oh, Shin is Korean? Oh.

HO: But Mrs. [Elizabeth Napuehu] Kwon was Hawaiian. Yeah, Mrs. [Anna Napuehu] Shin, too. They were sisters.

WN: I see, I see. What about stores? Were there stores in Kō'ele?

HO: I remember the stores were down at the city. Yet Lung Store and Okamoto Store.

WN: None in Kō'ele, do you remember?

HO: No.

HO: Yet Lung had a brother in Lahaina so that's where we used to go and shop once in a while. They were brothers. And he was a really nice fellow, this Yet Lung.

WN: How often did you go to Lahaina?

HO: Well, average, I think once a week.

WN: Oh, yeah?

HO: Yeah.

WN: That often?

HO: Yeah. You know, buy the bulk.

WN: Oh. Things like rice and things like that.

HO: Yeah, rice, sugar, shoyu. All the staples. And fish, well, my dad can get whenever he wants.

WN: Where did you board the boat to go to Lahaina?

HO: That's the part, you know, I don't remember what area. Because sometimes I would stay home, and just my dad and his friends would go. Yeah, sometimes, I would stay back. But, like when I have to go the doctor or something like that, I would have taken the boat.

WN: There was no doctor on Lāna'i?

HO: At that time I don't remember, you know, in the '20s. Maybe they did have.

WN: Oh, so, whenever you had to go doctor, you had to go to Maui?

HO: I think so.

WN: Oh, boy.

HO: But those days, it's different, see. The children were kind of healthy. I remember.

WN: Were there any emergencies that you remember of?

HO: Oh, no. The only bad thing that happened was, I was watching my kid sister. When I was about five, my mother told me to watch her. And she fell in the pigpen. (Chuckles) It's low and then she lost a tooth. (Chuckles) That's my mom's fault, too. You know, just keep an eye on her. And you know that age, they like to crawl. So, I was holding her and she just slipped, you know. Luckily the pigpen was clean.

(Laughter)

HO: That's the only one I remember.

WN: Oh, gee. So your father raised pigs.

HO: Yeah.

WN: He raised chickens?

HO: Chickens.

WN: Watermelons.

HO: Watermelons. Bees, that's his . . .

WN: The bees.

HO: Yeah. And . . .

WN: Charcoal.

HO: And charcoal.

WN: Anything else?

HO: And he did plant some vegetables, too, you know. He kept himself busy. Made 'okolehao, too.

WN: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

- HO: They work hard, you know, early in the morning. Let's see. Keōmuku is a hot place, see. So I remember he would get up extra early before the sun and then do his watering and stuff like that. And then, maybe later on he would go to his honey area because he had not only one area, you know. He had about two or three or four areas.
- WN: You mean, of honey?
- HO: Yeah.
- WN: Oh. Hmm. Was he employed by the ranch at all?
- HO: Yes. In between.
- WN: Oh, and what was his job?
- HO: Well, one time he told me he was taking care of that ranch area. I guess it's something like watch. . . .
- WN: Watchman?
- HO: Maybe. That was before the depress---before the hard times.
- WN: Oh, depression?
- HO: Yeah. That was somewhere maybe '31, '32, '33, somewhere in that area. That's when my sister was born. My youngest sister in 1933.
- WN: So your dad was, I guess, watchman for Kō'ele ranch.
- HO: Yeah, I think so.
- WN: And did he still live down Keōmuku?
- HO: At that time?
- WN: Or did he move up?
- HO: Well, in 1933, we moved up. We stayed at ranch already. Because I remember my sister was born in 1933. My youngest sister.
- WN: Okay. So you moved up by yourself to live on the ranch with the Abes to go to school for one year, did you say?
- HO: Yeah, about one year.
- WN: And then after that, your parents came up.
- HO: Yeah. So, let's see. My sister and my brother, when they moved up, they all started from first grade. So, we were all in the same grade in Japanese[-language] school because they didn't start from kindergarten. I started from kindergarten so when they moved up,

they skipped kindergarten. (Noise in background.) So three of us all in the same grade.

WN: How did you feel about having your brother and sister in the same grade as you?

HO: Hard. (WN chuckles.) Hard. In those days, elementary years, Japanese[-language] school started after school, after the English school, okay?

WN: Mm hmm.

HO: But in later years, we started in the morning before the English school. So it was hard.

WN: So you must have started early in the morning then?

HO: Mm. It's really early. Yes.

WN: Where was the Japanese[-language] school? Was it near the English school?

HO: Well, let's see, now. I think they rented a room, English rooms.

WN: Oh, oh, I see.

HO: Because was close to the old gym. You know, old Lāna'i City gym. But I don't think I see the buildings now at that time.

WN: So by the time you went Japanese[-language] school, it was already in the city then, not Kō'e'e?

HO: Yeah. But I still remember when I was in the sixth grade, I went to Japanese[-language] school, I don't know where that was, you know. And on Saturdays, I used to go sewing school. The same Takeshita-sensei used to teach. I remember I learned how to make smocking. Smockings, you know handweave? That's on Saturdays now. Every Saturday we learned one stitch. And at end of the year, I remember I learned about twelve smocking stitches. And one time, I remember I made Japanese--not kimono, what you call hanchan. Hanchan, you wear inside the kimono.

WN: Oh.

HO: Yeah. It's only on Saturdays. So we would make maybe one a year. That's on Saturdays.

WN: Whose idea was it to go sewing school? Was it your mother or . . .

HO: My mama was really ambitious, you know. She asked me if I wanted to go, so I said, yeah, why not. And those days, all the girls used to go. The ones really want to go. And when I was fourteen, I started going sewing school already on Saturdays and I did like to learn.

You know, that's why my mama let me go.

WN: So did you sew mostly kimono kind of things or did you sew like working clothes, too, or everyday kind clothes.

HO: Oh, let's see. Like that kimono, well, just for that Saturdays. Just for handwork, you know. But like dresses, on Saturdays when I used to go when I was fourteen, I would make my own. And my teacher was Mrs. Okamoto. She was so nice. She used to teach how to make the right way. And if you even have one-eighth inch crooked, we would take it off, you know. So, I'm glad she taught me how to make the right way, the neat way. She said, the habit going to stay, when you have bad habits.

So later years, when I went to another sewing school, this lady was never mind little kapulu but go fast, you know. But already I had that training to make it neat. So, I was happy. So, when I went to that second sewing school, she taught me from infant's clothes to man's pants. You know, one year time. Get going. Let's see, I used to bring my lunch. And then, let's see. Early in the morning and until four o'clock, eight to nine hours we used to stay and get going.

WN: Wow.

HO: Mm hmm. But I didn't mind. Was really interesting.

WN: Wow. Do you still sew today?

HO: So when my children were growing up, I made all their clothes.

WN: Oh, yeah?

HO: Yeah, shirts. Aloha shirts. Every night I used to cut one. And when I had about a dozen, get going. Start sewing the hot dog way. That means you don't clip the stitches; just keep on sewing. And then my daughter when she was junior in high school and when she was senior, I made her junior prom gown because on Lana'i you don't have a dress shop. And then, my daughter is, you know, on the plump side, see. So you cannot wear any type of gown. Took me two weeks to make one because I don't just stay. I had other things to do, you know. So, my house wasn't clean all the time because I had four kids and I had to take care of (chuckles) everything, you know.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: Did you sew for other people?

HO: Oh, yeah. When my youngest boy was still really close, I cannot

work. I did sew for other people, for my relatives and stuff. I did a lot of sewing. And plus, you know, I was with the University Extension Club and we used to have specialists come over to teach from the University of Hawai'i. We used to have specialists come and stay with us for maybe three days. So, that's when I would go and make my clothes, you know, real fitted clothes. We had Mrs. Harrow, Miss Kamisato, and my first U.E. agent was Miss Alice B. Tremble. I worked with her. She's really nice. But we had many more in between. That was in '49 we had Mrs. Tremble. She came over and she made our club, three clubs. One, two, three clubs.

And at that time, I remember, I wasn't the clothing project leader. I was something else and I helped her with the achievement program. She asked me, how come I'm helping her. But I told her, "Because I'm interested." And she was glad, you know, because I was interested at that time. When I had things to do, when I have to go to workshops, my mother-in-law was nice, she would take care of my children. So I did manage to go.

WN: You know back when you said that you dropped your sister in the pigpen?

HO: Yes.

WN: This was in Kō'eale?

HO: No, no. This was just before moving up to Kō'eale.

WN: Oh, okay. So your sister was born in '33?

HO: Not the '33 one, you know. The one was born in 1926 sister . . .

WN: Oh, oh, oh.

HO: I dropped her.

WN: Oh, okay.

HO: Not '26. She was born in '27.

WN: I see.

HO: Twenty-two, three, four, five, six, seven. Yeah, so I was about four or five years old.

WN: I see. So this was all down in Keōmuku, still.

HO: Yeah.

WN: So when your parents moved to Kō'eale, did they continue any of this piggery or anything like that?

HO: Well, Kō'eale, I remember we were living at the end house, you know.

And next is Armstrongs, you know, quite a space. We did have chicken. My dad used to raise chicken. I remember.

WN: I see. But no pigs.

HO: Ah, no, no pigs.

WN: And you know this Kahaleanu family?

HO: Yes, Mabel.

WN: So, did they move up to Kō'ele, too?

HO: Yes, I guess they did move up.

WN: Did a lot of families do that, you know, move from . . .

HO: Yeah.

WN: . . . Keōmuku to Kō'ele?

HO: Yeah.

WN: Why did they do that? Why do you think your . . .

HO: They moved that [ranch operations].

WN: . . . father moved? Your father and other families moved from Keomuku to Kō'ele?

HO: Well, I feel, at that time there's no job. I don't know what Mr. and Mrs. Kahaleanu used to do, even the Kaopuikis. We were down there because my dad had his honeybee, and was convenient for him, too.

WN: I see. When they moved up to Kō'ele, did he give up the honeybee?

HO: No.

WN: Oh.

HO: He had his honeybee business for a long time. The last time I remember, let's see. When Mr. [Kengo] Takata, he was our agriculture teacher in Lana'i High School. And he was advisor for the Young Farmers--that's my husband folks. And I remember my dad saying that the boys used to work with the honeybees or something, that sort of thing.

WN: So your father must have gone back and forth to Keōmuku a lot.

HO: Yeah, I guess so.

WN: I see.

H0: That was in 1950s, I remember. 'Cause my children was going to school at that time already, Lāna'i High School and Elementary.

WN: I see. What kind of foods did you folks eat mostly?

H0: Let's see. What did we eat? I know we had lots of dried fish, and vegetables my mom and dad used to get from Maui on the boat. And I remember my dad planting eggplants, papayas. So we have quite a bit of staples. And we used to eat lots of Saloon Pilot, yeah?

WN: (Chuckles) Cracker?

H0: Because bread, you cannot keep long. And crackers, I remember my mom used to buy by the five-gallon can. You know, those days were really cheap. And those days, a bread was maybe ten cents a loaf.

WN: What about refrigeration, did you folks have?

H0: I don't think we had refrigerator and we never did miss it. Funny, yeah? You know if you don't have 'em, you don't miss it. But I remember on the ranch, we used to have refrigerator. But what we have to do is, you have to buy the ice. And then put it in the refrigerator. And then that will keep the food cold.

WN: And you bought the ice on Lāna'i or you had to go Maui?

H0: Well, Keōmuku, I don't think we had refrigerator. But, ranch, we can get ice from the local stores. And then maybe you buy one big block, it would last maybe one week or two weeks, maybe, at the time.

WN: So without icebox, where was the food stored?

H0: Let me see, where did he. . . .

WN: Was it the kind of box with a screen?

H0: Oh, yes, yes. You call that "safe." Store it in there. But we didn't need no meats, maybe once in a while, I guess. But my dad used to dry his meats, sometimes, and dry his fish, and chicken, we have it in the yard. Lots of crackers, and they used to sell cookies in the five-gallon can, too. You can buy the whole can and that would last you long time. Oh, yeah. I remember my dad said that my mom used to love raw fish. You know, because you can catch fish. But I remember he said that raw fish is not good for the skin too much, you know.

(Noise in background.)

WN: Is that right?

H0: Yeah, that's what he said.

WN: Raw fish, meaning you eat sashimi or you . . .

HO: Yeah, sashimi. 'Cause when she came from Japan, boy, she had nice complexion. But he says the raw fish. (WN chuckles.) Yeah, she did . . .

WN: I didn't know that.

HO: That's what he said. But she had hard life, you know. 'Cause in Japan, she didn't have to work hard, but she felt Hawai'i is paradise. And then when she came on the boat, all the picture brides were on the boat, too, see. And some of them said, oh, they're going to Honolulu, some on Maui, and some on other islands, you know. But she says she was ashamed to say that she was going to Keomuku. So she said she's going to Maui. And people cannot find her. (Chuckles) Because she was the only one that came Lāna'i, you know. But Mrs. [Tama] Nishimura came a year after. [Tama Nishimura, wife of Susumu Nishimura, arrived on Lāna'i as a picture bride in 1923, probably more than one year after Ayako Tamura arrived.] So afterwards, at least I guess she had friends, yeah?

WN: Plus, there were probably some Japanese who came to work in the city, yeah, Lāna'i City . . .

HO: Mm hmm.

WN: . . . for pineapple.

HO: But you know it's so far at that time. But, while I was living down there I enjoyed, you know. It's so free. Everything is so open. You can go anyplace you want, you know. You don't have to worry about traffic and stuff like that.

WN: When you moved to Kō'eale, did you miss the beach?

HO: Yeah, in a way I did miss but not too much because I was busy going school and doing little things.

WN: Yeah, mm hmm. We were talking about food, you know, I would think that because living on the ranch, you would have a lot more beef.

HO: Well, Keōmuku is fish, most times. On the ranch, yeah, we had lots of beef because we had that cattle ranch. And you can buy meat reasonably, maybe, at that time.

WN: Where do you buy the meat?

HO: Maybe you can order through that area.

WN: Oh, I see.

HO: I remember we did have . . .

- WN: But there's no store that sold?
- HO: Like Rebecca [Kaopuiki Richardson] folks, they would know more, because at that time, they just got married [in 1932]. I was still going school. Oh, but I used to shop at Yet Lung Store a lot. All the staples. And we were having kind of hard time because, you know, six in the family. But, Mr. Yet Lung said, "Oh, don't worry, Mr. Tamura," or Murata, whatever he calls him. Said, "You have a big family. Someday they can pay the bills." (Chuckles) That's what he used to joke and say, you know.
- WN: So what, after Yet Lung came up in Lāna'i City, your father didn't have to go to Lahaina anymore?
- HO: Well, the Lahaina one is his [Yet Lung's] brother's store and then the Lāna'i City one is different. It's two brothers. But when we lived on the ranch, well, we go to the city store. But when Keomuku, we go to that Maui area.
- WN: I see. So it was easier to go Maui than it would be . . .
- HO: Come in.
- WN: . . . to go to Lāna'i City?
- HO: Yeah, that's what he said at that time.
- WN: (Chuckles) Interesting.
- HO: Because, you know the boat is big, huh, you can put more. Like horse is limited. You know what I mean?
- WN: Yeah.
- HO: The back.
- WN: Yeah. But he probably had to pay to go on the boat, huh?
- HO: Yeah, I don't remember that part. But still reasonable those days. I think it's only about, how many, three miles?
- WN: I think nine miles, huh?
- HO: Oh, nine miles, maybe.
- WN: Yeah, yeah. But Rebecca was telling us it only took about half an hour to go to Maui.
- HO: Oh, oh. Maybe.
- WN: So, pretty short, yeah.
- HO: Oh, Rebecca told you half an hour? Oh. Maybe, you know.

- WN: So, when your father went Maui, you folks would just, they would stay for that day and come back that same day?
- H0: Well, let me see now. I think sometimes we stay at friends' place because we had lots of friends in Lahaina area, yeah? And we go to the movies, sometimes.
- WN: Oh, where was the movie theater?
- H0: I remember one right in Lahaina. I was small, but I don't remember, you know. But, I did go to the movie. The one I watched was, you know, the flood was going on and had two homes. And this man put a long, what . . .
- WN: Bridge?
- H0: Board or bridge, and this family going across to the next to go in safety. Well, I was only about five or four or so, you know, kind of vague.
- WN: But Lāna'i City eventually had a movie theater.
- H0: Movie theater. I guess they did have earlier times, but, you know.
- WN: Uh huh. Do you remember the slaughterhouse, the ranch slaughterhouse?
- H0: Yes, yes, I remember. Let's see now, what---when time to slaughter, I remember the cowboys would go out and herd the cattle. And then, one by one, they'll--I don't know if at that time was bow and arrow or gun or whatever.
- WN: Right between the eyes?
- H0: Yeah. I was young. And then, I used to watch when they clean everything. And I remember they used to raise sheep, too. I remember they used to shave off all the wool, every so often.
- WN: So then what did the ranch consist of, what you remember? The slaughterhouse? What else? Office?
- H0: Well, office was kind of below. But that area, they had a pasture, I remember. And they had the slaughterhouse. And where they take out everything. What you call that? Where they clean and hang.
- WN: The . . .
- H0: Beef.
- WN: The beef. Mm hmm.
- H0: I remember I saw once. And then I'm sure, every so often, that maybe the ranch people or whatever were making orders, taking

orders. Maybe.

WN: And I guess had stables, too?

HO: Oh, yes. They had lots of big stables. That's where they keep the animals, huh? And I used to see lots of horses, and the cowboys would ride the horses and train them. All those things.

WN: I guess, you know when you think of cowboys, was there a lot of drinking and gambling and things like that?

HO: Well, I remember had lots of drinking. Beers. And then sometimes the cowboys would come down to our house, you know, Keomuku? And my dad would take out the, I guess this 'okolehao because I didn't see beer. And they have a party.

(Laughter)

WN: Were you afraid of any of the . . .

HO: Cowboys?

WN: . . . cowboys?

HO: Well, you know, we were really, you call that backwards, yeah? Country jack, maybe. We don't see people too much those days. So when the cowboys come around, we would run and hide in the bedroom. Me and my sister, younger sister, and my brother, we would hide. Actually hide. (WN chuckles.) Well, I remember these Kaopuikis, you know, Harriet. Harriet Kaopuiki, she's my sister's age. My sister Ellen's age. I remember she ran and hide, too.

(Laughter)

HO: Then when after I moved up the city, I went down, you know, to visit them, she went away. She did hide.

WN: You mean, she hid when you came to visit.

HO: Yeah, because already I was living, you know, ranch. She moved after, maybe. Because I remember Harriet. Like Elaine's husband, Sam [Kaopuiki] folks, were older, see. So I didn't see them at that time. But I saw Harriet.

WN: What about chores around the house in Kō'e'e?

HO: Oh, Kō'e'e? That's up the ranch. Oh, boy. I did quite a bit because I was the oldest. I used to help my mom wash the dishes and clean up, tidy up, take care my sisters. But the part is, I even had my own garden. I planted, let's see, one line of carnations. One line of lily. White lily grows high, see. So I plant close to the fence. And in the center I plant carnations, and then borderline I planted violets because violets are low. I make it

like a ladder this way. And when I need flowers, well, I have my carnations and lilies. And used to grow pretty well. Nowadays, I can't even plant lilies. You have to fumigate, have to use fertilizer.

WN: Did most other families in the ranch have gardens like that?

H0: I don't quite remember, you know, but I was different. I used to like gardening and homemaking stuff from when I was young. I used to love sewing. I used to cry, you know, that I couldn't go sewing school when I was about thirteen. I used to like. I thought, eh, being a woman you cannot sew, how miserable, you know. That's why my mother let me go sewing school. But some Hawaiian children, they didn't like stuff like sewing. They liked to swim. You know, like that reservoir?

WN: Mm hmm.

H0: They used to go in there and swim, you know. I did go, too, once in a while. But they would go. But it was really dangerous, you know.

WN: How deep was it?

H0: Well, they had this from low to deep. Not all even. So the younger folks would go to the shallow area at that time. But we used to have lots of fun. Hard to forget those young days, you know.

WN: Were you folks allowed to swim in there?

H0: No, it was not allowed. They used to have a watchman. But these people just, you know, when you young, you just sneak and go in, yeah?

(Laughter)

WN: The watchman. Was that what your father did?

H0: My dad, I guess, was more on the mountain area at that time. But, who would come along once in a while? Oh, like Mr. [Ernest] Vredenberg.

WN: Oh, the [ranch] manager?

H0: Yeah. Then, someone would say, "Oh, he's coming around." Or they would make sign or whistle, you know. (WN chuckles.)

And they used to have lots of fish in the pond. The red fish. Koi? You call that koi? And used to use hook to catch sometimes. And sometimes when the pool is full, all the fish used to come out from that area and go down.

WN: Oh yeah?

HO: How do you explain that part?

WN: What? When there's a flood?

HO: When there's extra big rain?

WN: Yeah.

HO: Naturally, the pool gets full. So the water would overflow and the fish and all would go out. Go right through from the golf course to the city area. Once or twice I remember it did happen and I can see the koi jumping all over.

WN: Is that right?

HO: Yeah, with the fancy tail, you know. There's some black ones and some gold ones.

WN: Nowadays, they're worth plenty money.

HO: Yeah.

WN: Koi. What else was in that besides koi? Anything else?

HO: Those little ones, medaka. You call that medaka. Loaded. And they used to catch the koi with earthworm. They use earthworm on the hook, one at a time. And then we put it in a tub.

WN: That's interesting. Do you remember who the watchman was? His name?

HO: Do you mean the mountain area?

WN: Well . . .

HO: Or that area?

WN: Yeah, the ranch area.

HO: Well, my father was watching one time, and I think Mr. [Robert] Cockett was, after my dad. And like the pond area, the ranch boss used to come and check once in a while when he hear loud noise. He knows the kids were around, yeah? Kind of dangerous. So he'd warn them not to get in. That's all. And sometimes we'd keep an eye, too.

WN: Was there a Mr. Munro?

HO: Mr. Munro? Hector. . . . Oh. Hector Munro was working for Dole but, he's, that's his uncle. What was his name now, uncle?

WN: George?

HO: Yeah, George Munro. He's a nice man.

WN: Because I think was George the one that used to be [ranch] manager before?

HO: Yeah, yeah. George.

WN: Did you ever go to the manager's house?

HO: Oh, yes. But they had a [grand]daughter at that time, Ruth. Ruth Munro. I don't know if that was George's daughter or previous one [George Munro's granddaughter]. So once in a while I used to go. We used to play together, once in a while . . .

WN: At the manager's house?

HO: Yeah.

WN: And then what? Did Vredenberg live there, too, afterwards?

HO: Yeah, Vredenberg lived afterwards. And they had a daughter by the name of Viola.

WN: What did the manager's house look like? How did it compare to, say, your house?

HO: Well, it was big. Lots of room. That was '30s and, you know, '40s, or '20s, '30s. They had nice things. But, you know, I really don't know. Like my days, were limited, you know, people, ranch hands. We didn't have that fancy stuff, but we had enough.

WN: I see. Okay. When you were living in the ranch, how did you get from the ranch to Lana'i City?

HO: Oh, I used to walk. Those days, let me see, now. Not everybody had cars. I don't think so. But walking, we never think nothing of walking. I did like it. It takes only extra few minutes, you know. So, I used to walk to school. Kō'ele [Grammar School] is close by. And then later on, I used to walk and go to Japanese[-language] school. But I didn't mind at that time.

WN: And then later on, you folks moved to Lāna'i City.

HO: Mm hmm.

WN: Yeah. Do you know about how old you were?

HO: Let's see now. My mom went to Japan in 1938. That's when we moved.

WN: To the city?

HO: Yeah, '38.

WN: So, you were like seventeen?

H0: Yeah, maybe about sixteen. Because my kid sister was five years old. That was in 1938. That's when my mom went to Japan. Took my kid sister. And then I stayed home with the rest of my family, I took care of them. She stayed in Japan for six months. That's long.

(Noise in background.)

WN: How did you folks manage with your mother gone for so long?

H0: Me? Well, you know, I'm independent. I'm not bragging, but I was matured already at that time, you see. Those days, you fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, you're matured, you know. You do a lot of things. And we had a friend. What was his name? Mr. [Morikazu] Kawano. He used to sleep overnight with us. So not too bad at night. But during the day, we managed.

WN: Who did the cooking?

H0: Me. I didn't mind. And I remember one month in June. And my sister, in Japanese[-language] school, she was in the second grade, she had to make a speech. So that night I stayed up almost all night and made for her a white dress! (Chuckles)

WN: Ho, boy.

H0: White dress. I still remember was square like that, you know?

WN: What do you call that style?

H0: Plain. Plain square neck because it's easy, you know. Square neck. Stayed up all night. (WN chuckles.) And that's not the only time. A lot of things did happen. Stuff like that that I have to stay up all night. But we take it as a stride, you know. I don't think my sister remember. But I was talking to her. She called up the other day when she came from Hilo. And we met at Ala Moana Shopping Center and we were talking. And she said, "Don't forget. We used to play peeowee and all that."

So I said, "Yeah, I'll try to remember."

And then, no telephones, you know, those days. No telephones. So when my friend wanted to take me to junior prom, I was baby-sitting, see, the manager's place after school.

WN: You mean, the ranch manager?

H0: Not ranch at that time.

WN: Oh, the . . .

HO: Yeah.

WN: The pineapple?

HO: Mm hmm. My mom thought it was good experience for me so I used to baby-sit every after school. And this boy approached me after school and asked me, "Can I take you to junior prom?" (Chuckles)

So I said, "Okay," you know. Stuff like that because there's no phones, you know those days. Even my sister wrote in the annual, too, eh, there's no phone.

WN: Where was your junior prom held?

HO: At the regular school. Oh, yeah. At the time, too, I had to make my own gown. Last minute. Made my own with orange taffeta material.

WN: Gee.

HO: Hard. Hard life those days. But, everybody else do it that way, so, why not, you know.

WN: The manager that you sat at, was his name [Harold] Blomfield-Brown?

HO: No, that was after, way after. This was other one [Dexter Fraser]. Oh, Brown was long time ago. [Fraser succeeded Blomfield-Brown as Lana'i Plantation superintendent in 1936.]

WN: Oh, oh, oh. I see.

HO: Baby-sat is only after school. So, only what I did is play with them, keep an eye on them, that's all. Because they were in the second grade and fourth grade, already. And Saturdays I used to baby-sit, too.

WN: How much did they pay you? (Chuckles)

HO: But, my mom thought, you know, it's good experience. Good experience. You have to have the positive attitude, you know. That's how I learn how to prepare meals, housekeeping the right way, and all that. So I was really thankful.

WN: I'm wondering. When you were a young girl, going school, did you have any idea of what you wanted to be? Or what you wanted to do?

HO: Well, our days, my parents used to say, well, since you're a woman, you have to learn sewing, number one. And at least how to take care the home and cooking. You know, those basic things. Basics. And be a good housewife and raise children.

WN: Well, I know you told me that your mother went to college.

HO: Oh, yes, in Japan.

WN: Did she ever want you to go to college?

HO: Well, in Japan, they were kind of wealthy. They had stores and my uncle had needle factory. He still have his needle factory. I saw ten years ago in Japan. But when comes to her daughter, me, she said, I'm the oldest. And they don't believe in going out from Lana'i and go to school. And plus, I was the oldest, so I stayed back. But afterwards, you know, my sisters, they all went to college. Business college and college. And they all did good.

WN: What about your brother?

HO: My brother finished. My brother Norman worked at the shop and then he saved money and he went in the service. And after he went, he became electric engineer--no, not electric. Shop. Is that electrical?

WN: Mechanical.

HO: Mechanical engineering, yeah. And then when he got out from engineering, right after the war on the Mainland, he said, "If you were an Oriental, they don't hire you," although he was top in his class. They didn't hire him until way at the end when they really needed engineers, then they hired him.

WN: You told me, too, that you worked little while for [Hawaiian] Pineapple Company?

HO: Yeah.

WN: When did you start?

HO: I started when my youngest boy started going school, kindergarten, and my mother-in-law was nice enough to baby-sit. And those days, Dole company needed every available worker for the summer. So, although my husband said, no, you don't have to work. Take care of the children, I said, no, I'm going, you know. So, I worked for the summers.

WN: I see. What did you do?

HO: Oh, I did everything. (WN chuckles.) Everything. So I know how to work.

WN: You mean, picking and . . .

HO: I know picking and harvesting and trimming. I did everything. And I feel that good to try everything. And the last few years before I thought I'm going to stop working, I had enough, I worked at the Dole cafeteria for three summers. I took the night shift. Midnight shift. Twelve to seven.

WN: Whew.

HO: Yeah, but was good. The only problem was, you work so fast, because you have night shift. If you don't finish the midnight shift dishes, the next 4:30 one would be coming in. So you just have to work fast. And the part is, my supervisor have their schedule, see. They would put my shift, maybe 12:30. And it's written so small. One time, I thought it was written 2:30. You know. Stuff like that. So, it's better to write your schedule big. I didn't tell my supervisor that, but you know, 12:30 when it's written small looks like 2:30, you know. (WN chuckles.) And then he'll say, "Oh, you're late." But I never argue and say, "Oh, you wrote down too small. I cannot tell the time."

(Laughter)

HO: Only I'm telling you today. You know stuff like that happen, yeah?

WN: Yeah, yeah. I would imagine most of the kids that went to Lāna'i High School worked in the pineapple fields.

HO: Yeah. Most of the kids did and they know what hard work is.

WN: Mm hmm. Did a lot of the ranch people work for the pineapple company, too? You know, later on?

HO: Yeah, yeah, some of them. And then the ones that cannot take it, you know, harvesting, they'll quit. Even like summer boys from the Mainland and Honolulu boys, they come over to work, harvesting. And, if they feel they cannot take the heat, they'll just quit. But it is hard work.

WN: Backing up just a little bit, how did you meet your husband?

HO: Oh, how did I meet him? Let's see, now. Oh, movies. Well, those days, we used to have a dance, maybe Saturday nights. And maybe once a month, I would go. And then that's how I met him. He's nice man (chuckles).

WN: So it wasn't arranged or anything?

HO: No, no. My husband told his parents, "If I'm not going to marry Helen, I'm not going to get married." That's what my mother-in-law said, he said that. So, later on, we had somebody, you have this arrangement that his side would come and my side would come.

WN: And had go-betweens.

HO: Yeah, go-betweens. You know, that's how.

WN: So you had a Japanese-style wedding?

HO: Mm hmm. My father-in-law wanted Japanese-style, because those days, you listen to your elders and get their opinions.

WN: Did a lot of other Lāna'i people get married like that, Japanese-style, with the kimono and everything?

HO: Let me see. No, I don't remember that much. I don't remember going to Japanese[-style] weddings at that time.

WN: Mm hmm. I see. So you folks' one was, I guess, different then?

HO: Yeah, those days, we didn't have catering service, you know. So all our friends really did work hard in preparing the foods. And then my dad, my father-in-law, and my mother-in-law arranged someone come from Lahaina to fix my hair. You saw my wedding [picture], the Japanese-style?

WN: Yeah, yeah.

HO: She came over and fixed. She stayed.

WN: Interesting.

HO: Different, yeah? So they were really nice, you know, that's why we were nice to them, too.

WN: Can we stop right here?

HO: Sure.

WN: And then if I can come back one more time later on and we finish up.

HO: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 16-21-2-88
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
with
Helen Tamura Onuma (HO)

November 29, 1988

Honolulu, O'ahu

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mrs. Helen Onuma on November 29, 1988 at her home in Honolulu. The interviewer is Warren Nishimoto.

Okay, last time we were talking about your wedding, but before we get into the wedding, I heard from other people that your father used to make 'ōkolehao in, was it in Keomuku?

HO: Mm hmm. Yes.

WN: What do you remember about that?

HO: Well, I remember he used to make 'ōkolehao by the gallons, with the help of his friends, you know Mr. Ohara I was talking to you about earlier. And then, my dad used to be a generous man so whenever friends come over, he used to serve them 'ōkolehao. Friends means cowboys from the ranch.

WN: Did you ever taste it?

HO: Well, I know (chuckles) how it taste like. It's pure white. And I used to see, how was it now, it was dripping, you know, going into the gallon. He used to make in the kiaue bushes, I think sometimes.

WN: So he had a still?

HO: Yeah, I guess so.

WN: I'm wondering. In those days, who was the policeman? I mean who---like it was probably illegal, huh?

HO: Well, I remember the policeman those days was Mr. [Thomas H.] Krueger. That was, I remember, 1930s, or early '30s.

WN: He was the policeman for the ranch, the ranch area?

HO: Yeah, I guess overall, yeah? I got lost once up in the hills. Not quite lost but, you know, we were young and I remember Mr. Krueger

coming around and helped us. (Chuckles)

WN: Oh, to find your way home?

HO: Yeah. That's when we were living up the ranch. So I remember Mr. Krueger very well. He was nice.

WN: He was a Haole man?

HO: Mr. Krueger is Mrs. Botelho's dad, Mrs. John Botelho's dad. She lives on Lana'i.

WN: Okay. So let's talk about your wedding in Lāna'i City. What do you remember about it?

HO: Well, I remember this hairdresser coming from Lahaina on a boat, I guess. And then my permanent was only one month old, and it was short. But what she did is, she made my hair really stiff and then she fixed it in that Japan bridal way. And she put on my makeup and everything. And she helped me with changing of my kimonos. I changed couple of times. Not one dozen, but maybe at least about six times.

WN: Six times that day?

HO: Yeah, yeah. I guess that was the tradition. I followed what my parents and my in-laws wanted, the way they wanted, you know.

WN: Did you understand what you were doing or why you were doing it?

HO: Well, like the kimonos, the first part, I wear that mon-tsuki, because my parents were Hiroshima-ken. So we used that Hiroshima-ken mon. You know that mon in the back? And then my father-in-law was Kumamoto-ken. So I'm sure I used that Kumamoto-ken mon, too, okay? And then after that, I used the regular type of fancy kimonos, you know, those colorful ones. And I remember this lady helped me, the one came from Maui because we don't have those formal hairdressers on Lana'i at that time.

WN: And when you changed kimonos, was it less, you changed into a cooler kimono or something like that?

HO: Yeah, I guess you can call it cooler, because it's colorful and lighter. Boy, it's hot with that kimono (chuckles). You have so many layers. You have that kimono and you have that inside and you have that skirt inside. And you have that tight obi. You know, so many obis.

WN: Did you have to change your hairstyle at all?

HO: Well, the hairstyle, no, I never did because she set it already in the Japanese wedding way. And it took her hours to have it fixed that way. And then afterwards, after a couple of weeks, I went to

Lahaina. And then I had my hair set again and with the kimono, I had the wedding pictures taken, the one you saw.

WN: Yeah. So when you had your hair set again, was that a different kind of hairstyle?

HO: Oh, the same way. She had to do it the same way, the makeup and everything. It's really time-consuming. But you see that pictures, and the wedding pictures is more than forty years, but you see how it still looks pretty good.

WN: Yeah, yeah. Was that kind of wedding unusual in Lāna'i?

HO: Yes, it is unusual. But before the war, like in Honolulu or other islands, I'm sure they did have that way, formal way. Because my parents were from Japan. So, you know, they wanted that way. And my husband is the oldest son of their family. So, I guess they followed the tradition as close as possible.

WN: But did other nisei like yourself on Lāna'i have that kind of wedding?

HO: Not that I know of. I haven't seen, you know. They have that regular American wedding.

WN: I was wondering, could it have something to do with, you know, your mother was sort of well-educated, came from a good family?

HO: Yes, that can be, too. But, let's see. She finished college in Japan and she could have taught school and she could have worked, but, you know, the parents sent her to sewing school and flower arrangement and all that. So she never did get a chance to work in Japan.

WN: So where was the wedding held? The ceremony?

HO: Well, like Lāna'i, we don't have any fancy place. So, the wedding was close to the city. I remember we rented a place.

WN: In a church?

HO: Well, we had the church ceremony first and then we went to another place for the reception. And even reception, we didn't have regular catering. So all the families and friends helped to prepare the meal. That's why Lāna'i people are really close. When there's weddings and funerals and stuff, they all come and help.

WN: The ceremony was Buddhist?

HO: Yeah, my parents were Buddhist so, you know. Reverend Takumiyo was my. . . .

WN: He was the one who performed the ceremony?

HO: Gee, I'm sorry. Reverend Kouchi.

WN: Oh, I see. So the wedding was like a all-day. . . . (Chuckles)

HO: All-day. All-day affair and all-day clean-up, you know.

WN: Do you know what went through your mind that day?

HO: Ho, a lot of things, you know.

WN: (Chuckles) So after you were married, where did you folks live?

HO: Okay, you know, like our days, the oldest son live close to the parents, okay? So there were no empty houses at that time. So we stayed with my mother-in-law for a while until there was an opening, the next house.

WN: Oh, next door?

HO: Next door. And just then the war broke up. So, we couldn't buy anything. No refrigerator. No couch. No nothing. But, somehow, we managed.

WN: So instead of a refrigerator, what did you have?

HO: Well, we were eating together with my parents, right next-door neighbor. My in-laws for a while.

WN: And how far away were your parents living?

HO: Oh, my parents living way the other end, farther. But, you know, our Oriental style is you stay with your in-laws.

WN: And how did you feel about that?

(Laughter)

HO: I had no choice, you know. But that's why I'm happy because I can cope with all things like this because I went through all that experience and I know how others feel, and how my children feel when they get married. So I try not to make that same mistake that the old people would make sometimes without knowing. You know, they mean well, but they sometimes like to give you advice, although you have a mind of your own. But it's good to listen, sometimes it's worthwhile. But my in-laws, they were really nice people.

WN: The house that you lived in, is it still there?

HO: Mm hmm. It's still there.

WN: Okay, and what was your father doing at that time?

HO: At that time? When that time I got married?

WN: Mm hmm.

HO: Let me see. He was working part-time for the ranch and part-time he had his honeybee.

WN: Mm hmm. Down in Keōmuku still?

HO: Yeah, yeah. And so, sometimes he stayed down there because he had a helper. You know, I told you about Mr. Ohara. So, he was, you know, keep an eye on that place.

WN: I see. And then part-time ranch, part-time beekeeping.

HO: Yeah.

WN: Did he work for Dole [i.e., Hawaiian Pineapple Company] at all, I mean, the plantation?

HO: No. That's what I remember, you know.

WN: What was Lāna'i like during the war?

HO: During the war, you mean, somewhere around 1941?

WN: Mm hmm.

HO: Forty-two?

WN: Mm hmm.

HO: Well, at that time I remember they were digging trenches in case there's an emergency. So, I'm sure every yard had a trench. You call that trench?

WN: Shelter or . . .

HO: Bomb shelter.

WN: Yeah.

HO: Bomb shelter. Everybody was prepared. But we never did use it. And then everything was blacked out. You know, the windows were all covered with black paper. And then the police would go around and if there's lights peeping, showing, they'll come and knock on your door. And my husband loves to read, so, once in a while, (chuckles) they would come around and knock.

WN: You mean, you could leave your lights on but you had to block up your windows?

HO: Yeah, block up the windows.

WN: What about the car lights? Could you drive at night?

HO: Well, come to think of it, I don't think they did go out at night because of the light, maybe. Because I don't remember going out at night.

WN: Were there soldiers around?

HO: Mm.

WN: Where were they stationed or where did they stay?

HO: They were stationed way by the, close to the, not too far from the airport area or Kaumalapau, somewhere they had this barracks.

WN: Oh, I see. Did they come up to the city a lot?

HO: Yeah, my husband made friends with one of the guys and we invited him over for dinner before he left. And then later on, he came back and visited us, after so many years, with his wife, so that was nice. And not too long ago, before my husband passed away, she came over and brought flowers for him. So, you know, there are nice people.

WN: Where are they from?

HO: Let's see. Where was it now? Where they make these Martin ukulele. What area is that?

WN: Martin ukulele?

HO: Yeah.

WN: On the Mainland?

HO: Kind of far because Martin--was it Martin?--yeah Martin, that's the fancy type of ukulele because I remember we sent our ukulele to repair and my husband telling me they live close by. His name was Burns, Mr. and Mrs. Burns.

WN: That's nice.

HO: Good to remember but sometimes, you know, we do forget, yeah?

WN: (Chuckles) Did you have to carry gas mask around?

HO: Oh, yeah. All the time, wherever we go. (Chuckles) Those days. Oh, and then, they used to ration the foods. They used to buy foods, you know. Ration. So, every family can have only so much of rice, and, you know fruits, depending on the size of the family. I remember in 1942 my mother-in-law lined up for me to get dozen of oranges for the week or so.

WN: When did your father stop working for the ranch? Do you know?

HO: Oh, yes. I remember that was 1953 he retired [from Hawaiian Pineapple Company]. That's when my son was born, my youngest son.

WN: Your youngest son?

HO: Yeah. My youngest son was born March 2, and I remember he was only about a month old, then my father retired. And then he said he was going to move to Hilo. So, he stayed with me for a month. My dad and my mom before moving to Hilo. Because, if he stayed with us, then he didn't have to pay for his rent, for his plantation house. At that time was about thirty dollars. But still, you know, thirty dollars, he can save that much. He stayed with us. So he left maybe in about May of 1957, he moved to Hilo. My dad and my mom. After he retired. Ichiro Tamura. And I had four kids at that time. And was hard for my mom. You know, when the babies cry, they cannot sleep at night.

WN: Right, right. There was a strike in '51. Pineapple strike.

HO: Yeah, pineapple strike.

WN: Yeah. What do you remember about that?

HO: Well, I remember people were having hard time, the union people, you know, hourly-wage people. But my husband was supervisor. So, he took his three-months' vacation. At that time, if you go to Japan or far, you can take three-months' vacation with pay. But if you stay in the Islands or stay at home, you only get six weeks. So, we went to the Mainland. We stayed three months. And my mother-in-law was nice. She told me she's going to take care of the children. So, I gave her enough for three months and I paid three months' rent. At that time we were renting the house. Forty-eight dollars a month, so I paid my rent in advance and we went to the Mainland. And my brother Norman is there and he took us around. When was it now? Oh, Mr. Meliton and P.C. Kim and my husband and myself, we all went together.

WN: P.C. Kim.

HO: Kim. He lives in Wahiawā now. He's retired. And since I had lot of time, I went to sewing school and got my diploma. And when I got back, I started doing some sewing for my family and friends. I wanted that real badly because then, I can sew for people and I can charge a little, you know. So, I made all my boys' shirts, aloha shirts. And I made my daughter's junior prom gown and senior prom gown.

WN: When did you start working for the Maui County Committee on Aging?

HO: Okay. Well, before that, I worked for [Hawaiian Pine] for ten years and I made non-regular [status] because they need able-bodied workers badly, during the summer especially. And my mother-in-law was nice. She said she would keep an eye on my kids. So I went to

work. And then when my children finished college, that was somewhere in 1976, my husband told me to retire, but I didn't want to retire. Because I'm the type that I like to keep myself busy. Occupied, you know? So, I applied for Maui County Committee on Aging. It's a part-time job. It's good. And I felt it's good experience because you learn all kinds of things. How to take care old folks and make referrals. All the things that I never did before. And I thought I'd like to try. And when I did apply, my boss told me, "How do you know you cannot do the job if you don't try?" (Chuckles) He's really encouraging. His name was Mr. Yokoyama. So, I did apply and let's see now. At that time my son was home, my oldest one, for Christmas vacation. And then I went through that book, Committee on Aging, Five Year Plan. I went through all. When I got stuck, he helped me.

WN: What did you have to do? What were your duties?

HO: Well, I did everything. Lunch program, we had about seventy-five people a day. I get the lunch from school and I serve. And then I make the referrals to social services and all types of referrals. And I take care of the maintenance of the senior center. And I had lots of--about fifteen to twenty--volunteers. And put in all volunteers' time. And we had other programs, side programs, like hula dancing, ukulele, card games. And when we have special guest, like for instance, we had a couple of specialists come from Honolulu that teach weaving, bookbinding, all those things. I would go and see my boss and see the school. If we can have this specialist come to senior center and help us, maybe two hours before they go to school. Stuff like that. I guess you can call it community aide. Lunch program manager and all, everything in one. But, it was really rewarding for me because I really did enjoy it even if the pay is not much. And then, at that time, every three months we would go to Maui to learn more things. Like first aid. And we had a workshop on Red Cross. All those daily things that we get involved with. The seniors that we might get involved.

WN: Oh, I see. Do they still do that today?

HO: Right now, what I'm doing is, they gave me--when my husband got sick--they gave me leave, for three years, I got leave. So, even, my leave is already pau. We have somebody else in. But since I'm really interested, I still go to open workshops wherever I can, because I'm interested, because someday, I'm planning to go back and I might do volunteer work or if I'm lucky, they might hire me part-time.

WN: This would be here in Honolulu, not on Lāna'i?

HO: Yeah, even in Honolulu, I can apply. There's lot of jobs, you know. But, my children right now, they need me. This house is so big. But I feel, someday, I'm going back to Lāna'i because I still have my house.

WN: When did you move here to Honolulu?

HO: Well, I moved about nineteen. . . . I came early part of '80 because my husband was sick. And he was going to Straub [Clinic and Hospital]. So, it's harder if I'm on Lāna'i. But the first year, 1979, when he was sick, I used to go back and forth on weekends and come over and help, whatever.

WN: So you said that you eventually going to go back to Lāna'i?

HO: Yeah, that's my plans.

WN: You still have your house there?

HO: Yeah.

WN: I see.

HO: But my Honolulu friends, I have this ukulele group, I've been playing music for eight years. We played at Ward Warehouse and we played at Ala Moana [Shopping Center]. And this Saturday, we going at Lunalilo [Home]. This is my third time, we play for the old folks. And it's all volunteer. So they want me to stay.

(Laughter)

HO: But I like Lāna'i life because it's not fast like Honolulu, you know. And I like to work in the garden. And I like flowers and vegetables. One time I had about fifty banana plants. Fifty, you know. All different types. Indian banana. Chinese. Bluefield. Apple.

WN: How big is your lot?

HO: Well, my lot, regular lot. But, you know, I plant it in a row. Straight below till my borderline.

WN: So you said Lāna'i life is a little slower?

HO: Yeah, yeah. And I belong to the University Extension Club. And I joined in '49.

WN: Almost forty years?

HO: Yeah, forty years and I'm still a member. Active member. I'm still paying my dues. And then when I go back, I'm going to show my work, like this.

WN: Oh, you have quilt?

HO: Yeah, quilt and stuff. Whatever I learn here, I bring back and show them. You call that daily active living.

- WN: You know, on Lāna'i now there's some changes going on, you know, they're building a hotel in Kō'e'ele, you know, and one in Mānele, too. How do you feel about that?
- HO: Well, way back in 1977, around there, we took surveys of people of Lāna'i. And we took the seniors' survey and they said they don't mind having hotels and stuff because they feel that their children can come back and have jobs. But that was almost ten years ago, they told me that. So maybe we might be going according to that survey, too. 'Cause now, they're building studio and one-bedroom apartments right next to the senior center.
- WN: Oh, yes. Mm hmm. Well, you know, with all this building, there's going to be more people on Lāna'i, yeah?
- HO: Yeah. It's just that there will be more people, so, you have to be more careful, especially in the city area. But, the people will be most at the hotel area, maybe, where the hotel will be built, and near the beaches. The sad part, I feel, is, they cutting down all the guava trees just to clear up the area 'cause that was the beauty, you know.
- WN: You mean, up the ranch area?
- HO: Yeah. Guava trees and some other rare plants and flowers and stuff because at one time that ranch area was beautiful. And wartime, we used to pick our guavas and we used to make juice for the children, guava juice, you know. You cut it in half, you add water and you boil it and you make guava juice. Maybe two ounce of guava juice concentrate to two ounce of water and you give that to the child for vitamin C. You know, war days when we cannot get stuff like oranges too much and fruits. And you can make jam, jellies.
- WN: So that ranch area had a lot of guava trees?
- HO: Yes, I remember we used to pick lots of guavas and passion fruits sometimes.
- WN: I guess, you know, with the hotel coming up and then the last two homes going--before it was all homes and everything--you know, how would you want the future generations to remember what was over there before?
- HO: Well, what I did was, I took my children up there one time, a couple of times, and I showed them where I used to live, and it did help.
- WN: I see. Hopefully after, you know, everybody reads what everybody has to say about the ranch, then, more people will remember it a little better.
- HO: Yeah. Whenever I have my friends, I take them up the ranch area, you know. Show them around. And, where I was living, next to the Richardsons, the third house, the principal, Mr. Weimer, was living.

Mr. Weimer, Mrs. Armstrong, Mr. O'Neal were living close, next to my place. That's when the school was at Kō'e'e. And Mrs. Armstrong taught me how to make pineapple-papaya jam.

(Laughter)

HO: And because I was good in homemaking, because my homemaking teachers were good, I was one of the three that was picked to go to Lahaina for our homemaking conference. That was when I was in the ninth grade. I wrote about pineapple-papaya jam and my gardening, that I raised strawberries. I got "A" in the report card. So I was one of the three to be picked (chuckles). And we went on the Nai'a. Nai'a is the boat. And was rough. Yeah. So Mrs. Armstrong left somewhere in 1941 or '42. She's gone.

WN: Oh, I think we're just about finished. Before I turn off the tape, are there any last things you want to say about your life on Lāna'i?

HO: Well, I had a good life on Lāna'i, Lāna'i City. Really good, and the last time I remember, I took my ukulele group to Lana'i City and then they played at the senior center. That was in 1984, Labor Day weekend. And they looking forward to going again.

(Laughter)

WN: Okay, well, thank you very much.

HO: Thanks. Yeah, I make for you lunch.

END OF INTERVIEW

LĀNA'I RANCH

The People of Kō'ele and Keōmuku

VOLUME I

**Center for Oral History
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